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AUTHOR Flanigan, J. L.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

A process model to assist school district superintendents in the selection of principals is presented in this paper. Components of the process are described, which include developing an action plan, formulating an explicit job description, advertising, assessing candidates' philosophy, conducting interview analyses, evaluating response to stress, and assessing references. The implementation of this model in several Kentucky school systems indicates initial success. School systems are encouraged to adopt systematic, rational means for principal selection. One figure illustrating the model is included. (46 references) (LMI)

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A PROCESS MODEL OF PRINCIPAL SELECTION

J. L. FLANIGAN
M. D. RICHARDSON
S. B. SCHNACKE
C. R. MARTRAY
G. L. ECTON

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Jack Flanigan is associate professor, Department of Educational Leadership; **Mike Richardson** is assistant professor, Department of Educational Leadership; **Steve Schnacke** is professor, Department of Educational Leadership; Carl Martray is Associate Dean of the College of Education; all at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green (502-745-4997). **Gayle Ecton** is superintendent of schools in Henderson County.

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A PROCESS MODEL FOR PRINCIPAL SELECTION

The decade of the 1980's has produced a plethora of reports regarding the school principal's increased responsibility in developing and maintaining productive schools. Researchers have postulated the principal's critical role in both school effectiveness and school improvement (McPherson, 1982), concluding with the contention that the principalship is the most crucial position in the school system (Trump, 1987).

As the principal's responsibility has increased, so has the pressure on school boards and superintendents to make appropriate appointments when principal vacancies occur. Because employing good principals should be a systematic process, this model is designed to assist superintendents in school districts in making more valid judgements concerning prospective principals.

BACKGROUND

With the increased complexity of the principalship, it is ironic that relatively little is known about how principals are identified or ultimately selected (Zakariya, 1983). Three factors of society in general, and in education specifically, impinge on the selection of future principals. First, the principal is currently viewed as the person "in the middle." The principal is perceived to be a true middle manager, being bombarded from above by superintendents and school boards, from below by teachers, and from both sides by parents, community, and students. Additionally, the continuing educational reform

movement places much emphasis on the instructional leadership role of the principal which is a different role from that historically practiced by many administrators. Consequently, school boards and superintendents expect principals to implement administrative policy while teachers and students expect instructional leadership and a supportive climate (McGiffin, 1988). Add the conflict inherent in the collective bargaining process, and the principalship is not as attractive as once perceived (Summy, 1986).

Secondly, societal pressures dictate that more women and minorities be named to the principalship. Research indicated that women occupy approximately three percent of all principalship while minorities make up a similar percentage (Peterson & Finn, 1985). Although many areas may not have significant minority populations, females are the majority of employees in most school districts, but typically occupy a minority of the administrative positions.

Third, approximately fifty percent of all currently employed principals are age fifty-five (55) or over (Finn, 1986). Consequently, the most dramatic administrative turnover in educational history will occur during the next decade. With the anticipation of such dramatic changes, school districts are encouraged to develop appropriate techniques for the selection of the next generation of principals (Baltzell and Dentler, 1983).

PURPOSE

According to Castetter (1981) there are five primary purposes for a specific selection procedure to be utilized when making selections for administrative positions. The first and most logical reason for a formal selection procedure is to find candidates "who meet established qualifications." Secondly, the procedures should identify candidates "who appear likely to succeed on the job." Locating and selecting personnel who are inclined to find "sufficient position satisfaction to remain in the system" is the third reason for a selection procedure. Fourth, candidates are assessed for employment based on "who will be effective contributors" to both school and organizational goals. Lastly, the selection process identifies candidates "who will be sufficiently motivated to achieve a high level of self-development."

The major objective of principal selection in school districts is to locate and employ persons who will be successful in developing, implementing, and coordinating programs that will educate children. With the financial constraints hampering many school districts, the selection process can prove very costly if the correct person is not employed.

A poor principal selection can often destroy an entire decade of progress, or hamper educational improvement for years. An ineffective teacher may damage a classroom of students, but an ineffective principal may damage an entire generation of young people. Thus, a rational system of principal selection that provides a pool of competent candidates is critical. (Sashkin

and Huddle, 1988). In addition, a systematic process provides the local board of education with a more objective "instrument of control to maintain and to improve staff quality" while the superintendent is provided with a means "for justifying personnel selections" (Castetter, 1981).

STEPS IN THE SELECTION PROCESS

The model herein described, and graphically illustrated in Figure 1, is designed to provide school districts with a selection procedure that can be utilized with most administrative vacancies. The model is not intended as a single information source, but as a process that can help insure both accountability and structure. Since many school districts do not attract the substantial number of applicants often present in large suburban or urban school systems, this model provides the districts with an opporunity for continuity, structure and accountability, in the screening and selection process. School districts are encouraged to validate all steps in this process within proper state and local employment statutes and regulations (Beckham and Zirkel, 1983)

ACTION PLAN

Whether this model or some other is utilized, a specific, systematic procedure should be developed and implemented by the school system to insure credibility in the selection process. Both school board policy and administrative regulations regarding

screening and selecting any employee, especially administrators, should be adopted locally. As more principal vacancies occur in the near future, the process of screening and selection will become more critical to all school districts (Cornett, 1983).

Normally, superintendents and their administrative staff cannot justify the time to interview thirty applicants; conversely, they cannot take the chance of overlooking the best candidate by not having a systematic screening and selection procedure (Redfern, 1984). In today's dynamic educational climate the possiblilty of excluding potentially capable administrators is too great to be left to a chance selection process, or purely personal or political considerations.

Additionally, many parents and teachers in areas often desire input into the selection of future principals, especially as candidates are screened for specific schools. Without a sanctioned process, many constituent groups or individuals many perceive an inability to significantly impact decision making, particularly in rural or isolated areas (Herzog, 1984). Superintendents and school boards cannot afford to alinate concerned citizens, so some selection process is imperative. Utilization of this model would allow groups or individuals to voice concerns or opinions as each step in the selection process continues.

JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Job descriptions are crucial and should be developed for each principalship position, as they provide the backbone for the

entire selection process. Without an accurate job description potential principal candidates are unsure of the job requirements and system expectations which can lead to the apprehension about the school system and the administrative position.

Job descriptions also provide a benchmark for candidate comparison. Potential principals can all be judged against common criteria, not some hypothetical rendition of "what should be." The job description should be explicit, organized, and an accurate reflection of duties and responsibilite assigned to the principal, including community and administrative expectations.

ADVERTISEMENT

Many school districts have negotiated employee contracts which either enhance or restrict the opportunities for advertising principal vacancies. Adminstrators must follow either the guidelines contained in negotiated contracts or local school board policies; however, every effort should be made to advertise to the extent possible. National or regional searchers may prove futile for many school systems, but state and regional searches are quite often productive in locating a quality pool of applicants. Searches should be extended as far as the superintendent and school board determine feasible, but should extend outside the local school district if at all possible.

Advertisements can be local or state circulation newspapers, national administrator newsletters, state newsletters, university placement services, private placement services, or simply by word-of-mouth. Accurate and timely advertisements are critical

to both the quality and quantity of applicants in the selection process.

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

Once the pool of applicants has been identified, several tools can be utilized to gather information about the prospective principals. One such instrument is an assessment of the educational and adminsitrative philosophy of the candidate. However, please be warned, no one test alone can determine the candidate's ability or potential. The applicability of this instrument is in conjunction with other procedures outlined in the model as it provides an insight into the "fit" between the candidate's philosophy and the school district's philosophy (Wyne, 1987).

Without an objective, written measure there is an over-reliance on non-specific determiners of "fit" (Baltzell and Dentler, 1983). Typically, there is a tendency in many school districts, to rely on personal perceptions of a candidate's physical looks, personal projection, confidence, and assertiveness (Baehler, 1987). The local version of "fit" frequently prevents a realistic assessment of outside candidates, women, and minorities, especially in some isolated school districts (Thomas, 1986). Accordingly, this instrument is designed to give all applicants a commensurate opporunity.

This instrument surveys attitudes of prospective candidates concerning the following topics:

Educational philosophy

Administrative philosophy

Community relations

Teacher observation/evaluation

Instructional leadership

Administrative management

Curriculum design/implementation

Staff supervision/evaluation

Staff development

Organizational management

School law

Effective schools

Leadership behaviors

Utilization of test results

Financial management

Discipline

Instructional materials

Special programs

Personnel utilization

(McPherson, 1982; Manassee, 1983; Huddle, 1984; Knoll, 1984; DeBovise, 1984; Cunningham, 1985; Bossert, Dwyer, and Lee, 1982; Murphy, Hallinger, and Peterson, 1985; Rutherford, 1985; Sange, 1982; Yatkin, 1986)

A sample question to be asked a prospective principal could be:

A parent came to school complaining that his son failed a class because the teacher was not teaching, only giving seat work assignments. He says that several other parents support his concern. As principal, what would you do?

A. Tell the parent to discuss the problem with the teacher.

B. Tell the parent you will investigate the matter, check with the teacher, and later call the parent.

C. Tell the parent that none of your teachers behave that way.

D. Listen to the parent and later advise the teacher not to give seat work.

E. Listen intently to the parent, but do nothing.

(Gibbons and Curnutte, 1987)

This flexible instrument provides the administrative team (superintendent, staff, others) the freedom to choose from a bank of questions. The questions can be tailored to the individual vacancy; however, the same questions should be asked of all applicants for the same position to insure consistency and integrity (Jinks, 1985). For example, certain questions are more appropriate for candidates seeking an elementary principalship, other questions for those applying for a secondary principalship, etc. However, all elementary candidates would be asked to answer the same questions. This flexibility is critical to many school districts who do not enjoy a large pool of applicants for administrative openings.

INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Perhaps more has been discussed and written about the oral interview than any other phase of the selection process (Donaghy, 1984). And yet, there is still immense concern regarding the inability of the oral interview to predict success on the job (Brannon, 1975). All personnel administrators and superintendents can share "war stories" about candidates who were

brilliant in the interview, but bombed miserably as a principal (Baltzell and Dentler, 1983). Despite the obvious deficiencies, the interview remains "a central component of most . . . selection procedures" (Tengler and Jablin, 1983). Some researchers believe the popularity of the interview is connected to the tradition of indoctrination historically practiced by some superintendents. Others speculate that some superintendents continue to employee by "gut level" perceptions about candidates rather than using more ojective data. Whatever the reason, the interview continues to be the "bread and butter" approach with many school districts.

The interview is designed to acquaint the school district with the applicant, and hopefully, the applicant with the school district. For many applicants, particularly those outside the district, this acquaintance stage many be their first exposure to the uniqueness of most school districts. Consequently, the interview should be structured, scheduled, and not handled in a haphazard manner (Tucker and Rowe, 1977). Most researchers agree that principalship interviews should be conducted by an interview committee rather than by one administrator (Diamond, 1974).

Oral interviews should be of two general types: the standardized and the open-ended (Donaghy, 1984). In the standardized interview, consistent questions are asked each applicant permitting comparison of answers. The open-ended questioning section of the interview allows the candidate to express opinions, beliefs, and attitudes about topics introduced by the interviewers or the candidate. This model incorporates

the use of both types of interviews (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1987).

The interviewing team is charged with the responsiblity of creating an atmosphere conducive to discussion and the freedom to exchange information. They should, however, arrange to have the candidates' responses recorded without being obtrusive (Goldstein, 1986). As a professional courtesy the adminsitrative team should allow the candidate to respond without fear, threat, or intimidation.

Samples of structured questions might include:

A. Why do you desire to be a principal?

B. What in your training and experience convinces you of your potential for success as a principal?

C. What is the principal's role in implementing school board policy?

(Rebore, 1987)

Samples of open-ended questions might include:

A. If the local Lions Club invited you to address their next meeting concerning the school effectiveness movement, what points would you make during your speech?

B. Describe one of the most successful accomplishments of your professional career.

C. Describe what you believe to be a principal's typical work day.

This process accords the interview team indications of several behaviors desired in the principalship; i.e. organizational ability, capacity to think quickly, verbal expression, aptitude for meeting deadlines, and interpersonal relations (Engel and Erion, 1984). The basic belief is that "the best predictor of future success is past success" (Stewart and Cash, 1985). Additionally, both non-verbal behavior and oral

expressions exhibited during the interview can be observed and documented.

In closing the interview, a standard explanation should be given on how the final decision will be made and when the selection process will be concluded. The interview team should be able to explain the remaining details of the process including when the candidate, whether successful or unsuccessful, will be notified (Stewart and Cash, 1985).

STRESS

Many superintendents and school boards in school districts have recently expressed a concern for additional knowledge concerning the criteria that should be utilized with principal selection procedures (Leithwood and Montgomery, 1984). One concept that has received considerable attention is the assessment center procedure. Assessment centers are desigend to provide enhanced performance information regarding candidates, typically as they respond to stressful situations or simulations. The most widely utilized assessment center for principals was developed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). Originally implemented during 1975, the NASSP assessment centers have assessed thousands of candidates throughout the United States and three foreign countries (Erlandson and Gonzalez, 1988).

The NASSP assessment centers evaluate candidates in twelve generic skill dimensions. These dimensions have been empirically determined, court validated, and are measured by various exercises

and simulations (Landholm, 1986). The primary pruposes is to provide more objective data to local school districts for assistance in screening prospective principal candidates (Mauriel, 1984). The NASSP assessment centers do not recommend employment or advise local school systems on who to employ, rather, the centers provide data on the candidates that can be used by the local school districts in conjunction with other data sources (Erlandson, 1987). This objective data is especially critical to school districts who must make crucial employment decisions, often with limited knowledge of the candidate's ability.

In the absence of an assessment center evaluation, this model is designed to provide a similar simulation for prospective principal candidates. The simulation also provides insight into organizational ability and written expression, which are both crucial to the principalship (Ackerman & Barch, 1988)

A sample questions could be:

> Yesterday you received a written directive from your superintendent to explain, in writing, why your school has not shown an increase in student achievement scores comparable to other schools in the district. Outline, in writing your proposal to improve test scores including, but not limited to, the utilization of personnel, financial resources, materials, supplies needed, and justification for your decisions.

REFERENCES

References are the most widely used and grossly abused element of the selection process. However, at this point in the process the superintendent of the school district should assume

the responsiblity for contacting previous employers to obtain expanded appraisals of the candidates. Especially when selecting prospective principals, superintendents or the administrative team should carefully validate the academic degrees and certification of candidates (Goldstein, 1986). If this step can be accomplished during the interview, the time savings for the superintendent would be advantageous.

Letters of reference are typically not useful at this juncture in the process. At best, letters of reference indicate only that a person has significant contacts to request and obtain such a letter. Most letters of reference address personal attributes and are not valid indicators of future performance (Stewart and Cash, 1985). Rather than relying on letters of reference, the superintendent should make follow-up telephone calls to selected references or contacts. Although this in not a fool proof approach, many persons are more willing to discuss a candidate by telephone than in writing.

When the information from the reference check is compiled with the other documentation collected in the selection process, the superintendent makes an employment recommendation to the school board. All candidates, regardless of their standing in the process, are notified of the decision (Baltzell and Dentler, 1983).

IN OPERATION

The concept sounds great in theory, but does it actually work in practice? Several school systems in Kentucky have

implemented this alternative model and preliminary findings indicate that the system works well. Potential principals are given a renewed sense of personal integrity in the selection process and those making the selections indicate that the candidates are better prepared for the reality of principalship (Laws, Brown and Richardson, 1989).

Although the results appear favorable, potential adopters should be wary of two points. First, this process demands a considerable amount of time and energy; it doesn't happen without advance preparation. Second, superiors making the personnel decisions must be aware of the implications for boosting or destroying teacher morale by this program. However, experience has shown that it is "cheaper" to hurt the morale of a teacher than to have an ineffective principal destroy a school.

CONCLUSION

Research reported during the past decade illustrates the increasingly important role of the school principal. Because of the principal's value, principal selection procedures have also become more critical to school districts. School systems are encouraged to adopt systematic, rational means for selection which will enable superintendents to make more valid, objective decisions when selecting future principals.

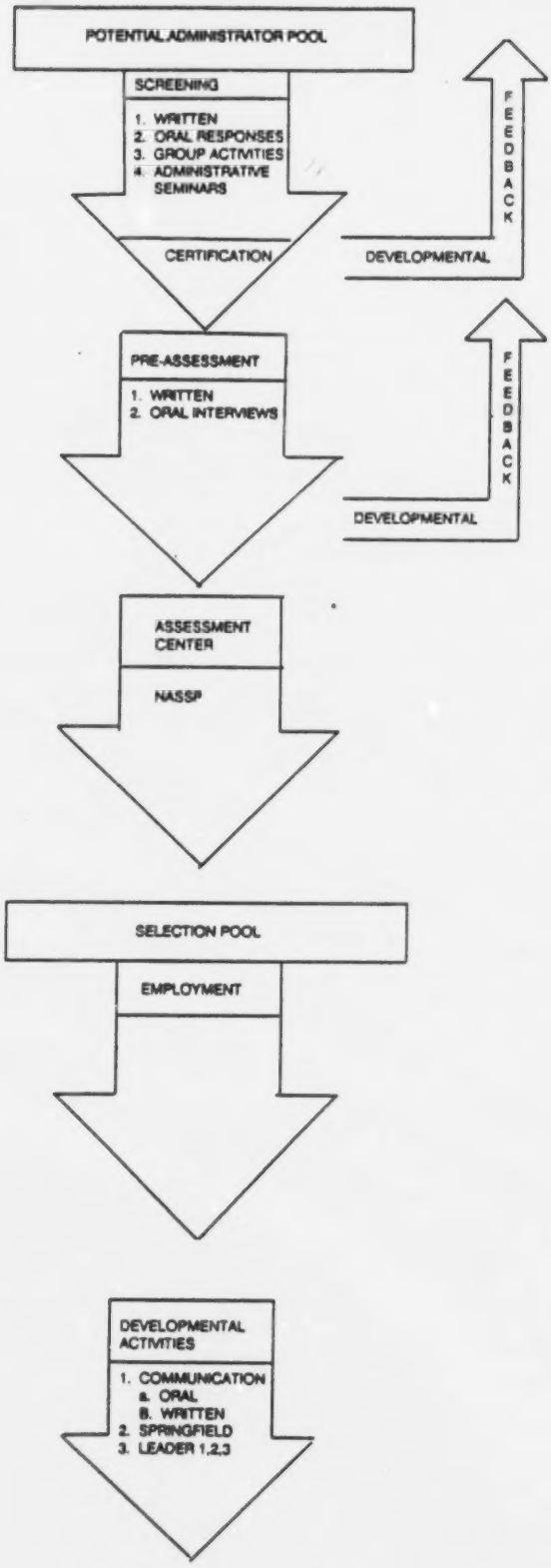
POTENTIAL ADMINISTRATOR POOL
SCREENING
1. WRITTEN
2. ORAL RESPONSES
3. GROUP ACTIVITIES
4. ADMINISTRATIVE SEMINARS
CERTIFICATION
DEVELOPMENTAL
FEEDBACK
PRE-ASSESSMENT
1. WRITTEN
2. ORAL INTERVIEWS
DEVELOPMENTAL
FEEDBACK
ASSESSMENT CENTER
NASSP
SELECTION POOL
EMPLOYMENT
DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES
1. COMMUNICATION
a. ORAL
B. WRITTEN
2. SPRINGFIELD
3. LEADER 1,2,3

FIGURE 1

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